

# **III. SUPPLY OF OUTDOOR RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES**

## **The Outdoor Recreation Spectrum**

Outdoor recreation encompasses a great variety of outdoor recreational activities because people look for many different types of experiences. The desire for different experiences causes people to choose between solitude or crowds, natural surroundings or man-made facilities, and physically challenging or relaxing activities. Table 3.1 summarizes the outdoor recreational spectrum by presenting its opposite ends. Urban and modern settings, activities, and experiences are contrasted with the primitive and remote end of the spectrum. These distinctions are based on the Outdoor Recreation Opportunity Spectrum developed by the U.S. Forest Service as a framework for describing outdoor recreation in terms of experience, activities and settings.

The spectrum, or range of resources, corresponds roughly to providers. The federal government supplies a large amount of the undeveloped land and water used for outdoor recreation in North Carolina. At the other end of the spectrum, local governments and the private sector provide the bulk of highly developed recreation resources. In North Carolina, state-owned outdoor recreation lands are generally more resource based than most southeastern states.

Natural resources and man-made facilities provide the settings usually needed for outdoor recreation. As described in the outdoor recreation spectrum, natural resources vary from settings like ocean beaches and scenic mountain vistas to urban open space. A description of the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) park and recreation area classes is presented in Table 3.2.

As much as any trait, North Carolina's outdoor recreation resources can be characterized by their diversity. One common characteristic these recreation resources share is their dependence on land and water resources. Any land or water resource that is used to produce satisfying leisure experience is a recreation resource.

Outdoor recreation activities can be divided into those that depend primarily on a man-made facility and those that depend primarily on a natural resource (Table 3.3). The facility-dependent activities, such as tennis courts, can be placed at many locations and still provide a similar experience. Resource-dependent activities, such as sailboating, must be located where suitable natural resources are available. For each activity, the appropriate facility has been identified.

**Table 3.1. The Spectrum of Outdoor Recreation Activities<sup>1</sup>**

	MODERN/URBAN	PRIMITIVE/REMOTE
<b>SETTINGS</b>		
<b>PROXIMITY</b>	close to home	far from home
<b>SIZE</b>	less than 100 acres	several thousand acres
<b>FACILITIES</b>	extensive facilities	limited or no facilities
<b>NATURAL RESOURCES</b>	man-made environment dominates; natural resources secondary	natural environment dominant; little/no development
<b>ACTIVITIES:</b>	facility dependent	natural resource dependent
<b>EXPERIENCES:</b>		
<b>LEISURE TIME</b>	Participation in short time periods possible;	Substantial blocks of time required for participation
<b>MANAGEMENT CONTROLS</b>	Regimentation and controls obvious and numerous	On-site regimentation low, with controls primarily off-site
<b>SOCIAL INTERACTION</b>	Large numbers of users on-site and in nearby areas	Few people encountered per day
<b>CHARACTER OF EXPERIENCE</b>	Opportunities for competitive and spectator sports and for passive uses of highly developed parks are common; experiencing natural environment-related challenges and risks and using outdoor skills are relatively unimportant; contact with other people is prevalent, as is convenience of sites and opportunities.	High probability of experiencing isolation from sights and sounds of humans; independence; closeness to nature; tranquility and self-reliance through the application of primitive outdoor skills in an environment that offers challenge and risk.

<sup>1</sup> Sources: *R. O. S. Users Guide*, U.S. Forest Service, Department of Agriculture

*Recreation, Park and Open Space Standards and Guidelines*, National Recreation and Park Association

**Table 3.2 SCORP Park and Recreation Area Class Names and Descriptions**

Area Name	Description
Neighborhood Park	Area for intensive recreation such as field and court games, playground equipment, picnicking and wading pools. 6-8 acres is a typical size. Examples include mini-parks serving residential areas, playgrounds, sports field complexes and combination playgrounds/sports fields/passive natural areas.
Community Park	Area providing a wide array of active recreational opportunities including a recreation center building, fields, hard surface courts, and picnicking. Natural or landscaped areas are provided for passive recreation. May include a swimming pool or be in conjunction with a school. 10-20 acres is a typical size. Examples include large park/school complexes; recreation center/ pool/sports field and court complexes; and community center/park complexes.
District/Metro Area Park	Area serving one or more suburban or rural communities. Similar to the Community Park, these areas offer intensive recreation activities and natural environment areas. Typical size is 20-100 acres. Examples include intensively developed county parks, developed public recreation sites at large reservoirs, and state recreation areas.
Local Parks	Combines Neighborhood, Community, and District/Metro Area parks classes described above.
Regional/State Parks	Area of natural quality for natural resource-based outdoor recreation. Generally, 80 percent of the land is reserved for conservation and natural resource management with less than 20 percent developed for recreation. Typical size is 3,000-5,000 acres. Examples include state parks, state recreation areas, state natural areas, educational state forests and large natural resource-based county parks. Activities include nature study, picnicking, camping, fishing, boating, swimming, and various trail uses.
Dispersed Use/ Conservancy Area	Area for protection and management of the natural environment with recreation use as a secondary objective. Certain multiple use management approaches produce natural resource outputs such as timber, agricultural produce and minerals. Examples include state gamelands, multiple use areas of national and state forests, reservoir shoreline buffer lands, and Blue Ridge Parkway acreage. Typical size should be sufficient to protect and manage the primary resource while providing secondary recreational uses.
Wilderness Area	Area characterized by unmodified natural environment of fairly large size. Low interaction between users, and evidence of others is minimal. Motorized use is not permitted. Typical size is 5,000-15,000 acres. Examples are congressionally designated National Wilderness Areas.

**Table 3.3. Outdoor Recreation Activities and Related Facilities**

FACILITY-DEPENDENT ACTIVITIES		NATURAL RESOURCE-DEPENDENT ACTIVITIES	
ACTIVITY	FACILITY	ACTIVITY	FACILITY
Baseball	Fields	Bicycle Touring	Rural Highways
Basketball	Courts	Camping, Tent	Sites
Bicycling	Urban Bikeways	Camping, Trailer	Sites
Football	Fields	Canoeing	Stream Access
Golf	Courses	Hiking	Trails
Playground Use	Tot Lots	Horseback Riding	Trails
Soccer	Fields	Nature Study	Interpretive Trails/ Natural Areas
Softball	Fields	Swimming, Non-pool	Designated Beaches
Swimming, Pool	Pools	Mountain Biking	Trails
Tennis	Courts		
Volleyball	Courts		
In-line Skating	Paved trails/sidewalks		

An inventory of public recreation sites has been performed to measure the supply of the recreational resources in each county. The inventory used the area and facility classifications discussed previously to count the parks and facilities at public recreation sites in North Carolina. For example, the supply of softball fields in a county is simply the total number of softball fields found in all public parks. Park acreages have been classified according to the type of park areas and totaled for each county. The statewide summary for the park acreage inventory is presented in Table 3.4, and the summary of recreational facilities is shown in Table 3.5. County totals for both park acreages and some facilities are included in Appendix A. Approximately 8.9 percent of the state is recreational acreage. Most of this acreage is composed of state gamelands and federally owned forests and parklands.

**Table 3-4. Outdoor Recreation Acreage by Operator and Site Classification**

SITE CLASSIFICATION	OPERATOR CLASSIFICATION				Total
	FEDERAL	STATE	MUNICIPAL	COUNTY	
Local	0	0	47,623	39,976	87,609
Dispersed Use	2,154,637	484,378	0	0	2,639,015
Totals:	2,154,637	484,378	47,623	39,976	2,726,624

**Table 3-5. Statewide Totals for Outdoor Recreation Facilities by Operator Class**

ACTIVITY	FACILITY	OPERATOR CLASS				TOTAL
		FEDERAL	STATE	MUNICIPAL	COUNTY	
Basketball	Courts	3	0	764	282	1049
Football	Fields	0	0	113	137	250
Soccer	Fields	0	0	504	410	914
Softball	Fields	0	1	495	381	876
Baseball	Fields	0	0	740	507	1247
Team Sports	Multi-Purpose Fields	0	0	383	259	642
Playground Use	Playground	7	0	1259	381	1647
Swimming	Pools	0	0	132	36	168
Tennis	Courts	0	0	1,535	559	2094
Picnicking	Shelter	7	94	1135	508	1744
Trails (All Types)	Miles	1,970.2	377.9	976.3	383.5	3,707.9
Volleyball	Courts	0	0	202	124	326

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### **COMPARING COUNTIES BASED ON RECREATION RESOURCES AND POPULATION**

In SCORP documents developed prior to 1995, standards were used to describe adequate quantity of public recreational acreage and facilities based on population. Since 1995, the SCORP no longer recommends using standards based on population (such as one tennis court per 2,000 people) to express recreation needs in North Carolina, a position supported by the National Recreation and Park Association. These standards take a cookie-cutter approach that recommends the same services for all counties when in fact each county and community has unique characteristics and preferences. Some of these differences include population density and diversity, roads and transportation, geography, natural resources, state and federal land ownership, and amounts of tourism. No single standard can be accurately applied to all of North Carolina because the state includes areas as diverse as the Charlotte metropolitan area, remote areas of the Appalachian Mountains, large rural areas in the Coastal Plain, and wide beaches of the North Carolina coast. Recreation needs should be determined by the preferences of the people in the market area, the existing recreation resources, levels of tourism, and the characteristics that make the area unique.

Instead of prescribing an appropriate level of recreation services for each county by applying a standard, the SCORP provides information that allows North Carolina counties to be compared to each other according to current recreation resources and county population. The need for recreational facilities and acreage is based on population and thus, counties with the larger populations also need more park acreage and recreational facilities. But on a per capita basis, all counties can be compared.

Population density across the state is shown on the map in Figure 3.1. North Carolina's population is most concentrated in the central portion of the state,

which includes the Piedmont crescent containing Mecklenburg, Guilford, Wake, Forsyth, and Durham counties.

To compare counties according to recreation resources and population, each county population is divided by the park acreage and recreation facility totals for that county. The calculations indicate the number of number of county residents per park acre or recreation facility. After calculating these numbers for each North Carolina county, all 100 counties can be ranked according to residents per acre (or facility). Counties with high numbers of residents per park acre rank lower, in terms of sufficiency, than counties with fewer residents per park acre because more people have to compete to use existing park land.

Figures 3.2 through 3.7 show all North Carolina counties shaded according to the residents per park acre for the local park acreage classes as well as the residents per facility for five recreational facilities (basketball courts, picnic shelters, playgrounds, trail miles, and softball fields). On each map, counties with darker, more solid shading have fewer residents per park acre or recreation facility and counties with lighter shading have more residents per resource.

In addition to the maps that compare all North Carolina counties according to residents per acre or facility, Appendix A contains 100 county profiles. Each profile presents the county population and the current supply of recreation facilities and park acreage. The profile also presents several calculations based on residents per acre or facility, the county's ranking in the state, and the state median.

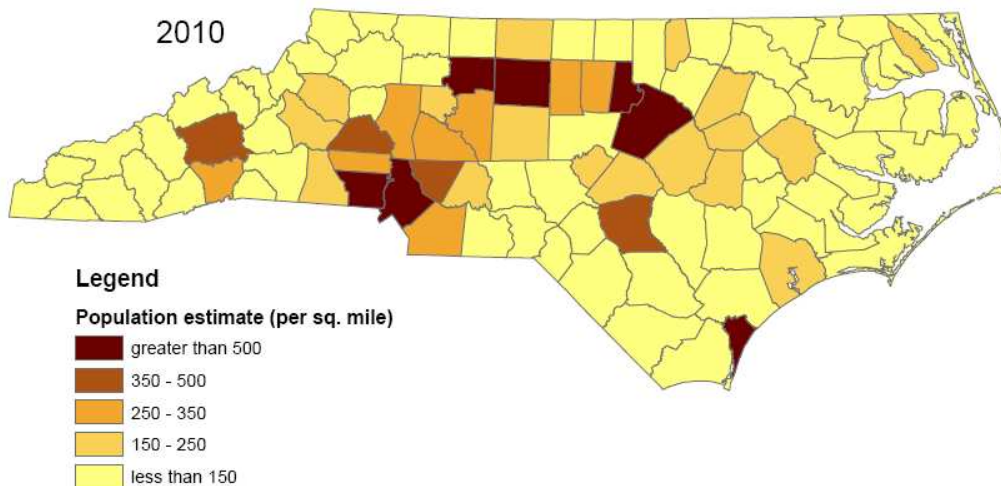


Figure 3.1 Population Densities by County in 2010

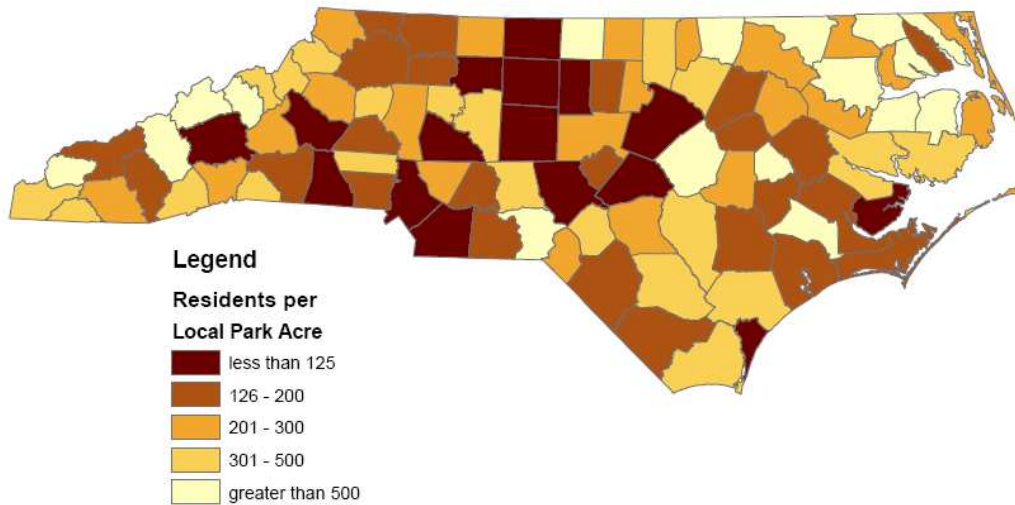


Figure 3.2 County Residents per Local Park Acre

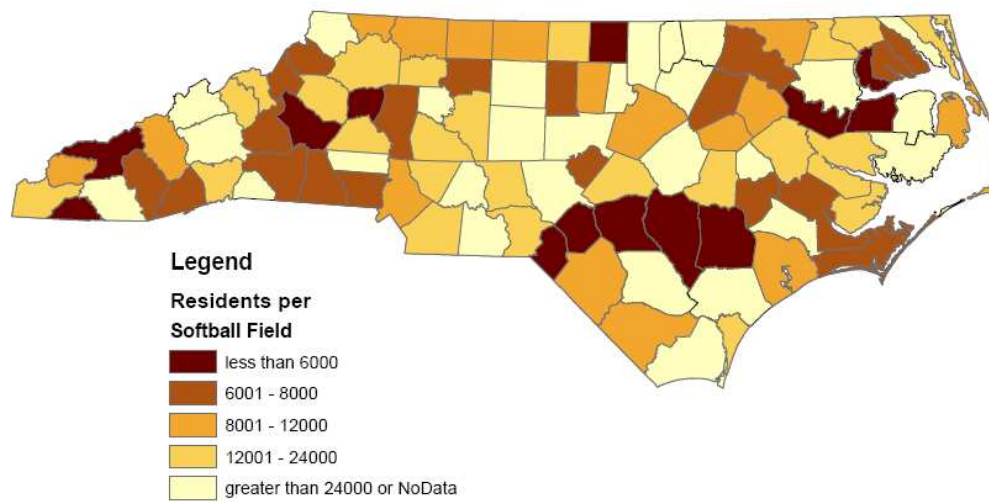


Figure 3.3 County Residents per Softball Field



